



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO AMERICA

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
FOR ALL THE SICK IN MEXICO**

*Adolfo López Mateos Hospital
Sunday, 24 January 1999*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. As I have done on other Pastoral Visits across the world, on this one, my fourth to Mexico, I also wanted to share with you, dear sick people hospitalized in this centre named after Adolfo López Mateos - and through you with all the other sick of the country - a few moments of prayer and hope. I would like to assure you of my affection and, at the same time, I join in your prayer and that of your loved ones, asking God, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin of Guadalupe, for fitting health of body and soul, the full identification of your sufferings with those of Christ and the search for reasons which, based on faith, help us to understand the meaning of human suffering.

I feel very close to each one of those suffering, as well as to the doctors and other health-care professionals who offer their selfless service to the sick. I would like my voice to transcend these walls to bring Christ's voice to all the sick and to all health-care workers, and to offer in this way a word of comfort in their illness and of encouragement in the mission of assistance, recalling in particular the *value of suffering within the framework of the Saviour's redemptive work*.

To be with you, to serve you with love and skill, is not only a humanitarian and social work, but above all an *eminently evangelical* activity, since Christ himself invites us to imitate the Good Samaritan, who, on seeing the suffering man on the wayside, did not "pass by on the other side" but "had compassion and went to him and bound up his wounds ... and took care of him" (Lk 10:32-34). Many pages of the Gospel describe Jesus' meetings with those burdened by various

illnesses. Thus St Matthew tells us that Jesus "went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them" (Mt 4:23-24). When St Peter, following in Christ's footsteps, reached the Beautiful Gate of the temple, he made a lame man walk (cf. Acts 3:2-5), and when rumours of what had happened spread, "they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and pallets, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them" (ibid., 5:15-16). From the beginning, the Church, moved by the Holy Spirit, has wanted to follow the example of Jesus in this regard, and thus she considers it a duty and a privilege to stay beside the suffering person and to nurture a preferential love for the sick. I therefore wrote in the Apostolic Letter *Salvifici doloris*: "Born of the mystery of Redemption in the Cross of Christ, the Church has to try to meet man in a special way on the path of his suffering. In this meeting man "becomes the way for the Church", and this way is one of the most important ones" (n. 3).

2. Man is called to joy and to a happy life, but everyday he experiences many forms of pain, and illness is the most frequent and common expression of human suffering. In the face of it we spontaneously wonder: "Why do we suffer? For what do we suffer? What does people's suffering mean? Can physical or moral pain be a positive experience? Each one of us has certainly asked these questions more than once, either from our bed of pain, during convalescence, before undergoing surgery, or whenever we have seen a loved one suffer.

For Christians these are not unanswerable questions. *Suffering is a mystery*, often inscrutable to reason. It is part of the mystery of the human person, which is only explained in Jesus Christ, the One who reveals to man his own identity. Only through him will we find the meaning of all that is human. "Suffering", as I wrote in the Apostolic Letter *Salvifici doloris*, "cannot be transformed and changed by a grace from outside, but from within.... However, this interior process does not always follow the same pattern.... Christ does not answer directly and he does not answer in the abstract this human questioning about the meaning of suffering. Man hears Christ's saving answer as he himself gradually becomes a sharer in the sufferings of Christ. The answer which comes through this sharing ... is above all a call: "Follow me!". Come! *Take part through your suffering in this work of saving the world*, a salvation achieved through my suffering! Through my Cross" (n. 26). This is why, when faced with the enigma of suffering, we Christians can say: "Your will be done, Lord", and repeat with Jesus: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Mt 26:39).

3. Man's greatness and dignity consist in being a child of God and being called to live in intimate union with Christ. This participation in his life brings with it a sharing in his pain. The most innocent of men - the God made man - was the great sufferer who took upon himself the weight of our failings and sins. When he announced to his disciples that the Son of Man had to suffer much, to be crucified and on the third day to rise again, he also warned that anyone who wanted to come

after him would have to deny himself, take up his cross each day and follow him (cf. Lk 9:22ff.). Therefore there is a close relationship between Jesus' Cross - a symbol of supreme suffering and the price of our true freedom - and our pains, sufferings, afflictions, hardships and anguish which can weigh on our souls or take root in our bodies. Suffering is transformed and elevated, when in those moments we become aware of God's closeness and solidarity. This is the certainty that gives inner peace and spiritual joy to the person who suffers generously and offers his pain "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom 12:1). The person who suffers in this way is not a burden to others, but by his own suffering contributes to the salvation of all.

Seen in this way, illness and the darker moments of human life acquire a profound dimension, even one of hope. We are never alone before the mystery of suffering: we are with Christ who gives meaning to all life: in moments of peace and joy, as well as in moments of affliction and sorrow. With Christ, everything has meaning, even suffering and death; without him, nothing can be fully explained, not even the legitimate pleasures God has joined to the various moments of human life.

4. The position of sick persons in the world and in the Church is not in any way passive. In this respect, I would like to recall the words which the Synod Father addressed to them at the end of the Seventh Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: "We need you to teach the whole world what love is. We will do everything we can so that you may find your rightful place in the Church and in society" (*Per Concilii semitas ad Populum Dei Nuntius*, n. 13; *L'Osservatore Romano English edition*, 2 November 1987, p. 11). As I wrote in my Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*: "The Lord addresses his call to each and every one. Even the sick are sent forth as labourers into the Lord's vineyard: the weight that wearies the body's members and dissipates the soul's serenity is far from dispensing a person from working in the vineyard. Instead the sick are called to live their human and Christian vocation and to participate in the growth of the kingdom of God in a new and even more valuable manner.... Many of the sick can become bearers of the "joy inspired by the Holy Spirit in much afflictions" (1 Thes 1:6), and be witnesses to Jesus' Resurrection" (n. 53). In this regard, we should remember that those who live in sickness are not only called to unite their suffering with the Passion of Christ, but to play an active part in the proclamation of the Gospel, bearing witness by their own faith experience to the strength of the new life and happiness that come from encountering the risen Lord (cf. 2 Cor 4:10-11; 1 Pt 4:13; Rom 8:18ff.).

With these thoughts, I have wished to inspire in each and every one of you the sentiments which enable us to undergo these present trials in a supernatural way, seeing them as an opportunity to discover God among the shadows and doubts and to glimpse the broad horizons that can be seen from the height of our daily crosses.

5. I would like to extend my greetings to all the sick in Mexico, many of whom are following this visit on radio or television; to their relatives, friends and all who help them during these moments

of trial; to the medical and health-care staffs, who contribute their knowledge and care to overcoming or at least to lightening them; to the civil authorities concerned with the progress of hospitals and other treatment centres in the various states throughout the country. I would especially like to mention the consecrated persons who live their religious charism in the health-care field, as well as the priests and other pastoral workers who help them find comfort and hope in faith.

I cannot fail to express my gratitude for the prayers and sacrifices so many of you offer for me and my ministry as Pastor of the universal Church.

As I give this Message to Bishop José Lizares Estrada, Auxiliary of Monterrey and President of the Episcopal Commission for Health-Care Ministry, I again offer you my greetings and my affection in the Lord, and through the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, who said to Bl. Juan Diego, "Am I not your health?", thus revealing herself as the One we Christians call upon with the title "Salus infirmorum", I cordially impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.

Mexico City, 24 January 1999.

JOHN PAUL II

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